

TEENS & CONDOMS

AKA: Love Skin; Slick; Wet Suit; Love Sock; The Goalie; Love Glove; Willie Warmer; Sheath; Raincoat...

Why do people always go on about condoms?

Because if you want to have sex with someone, they're important! Sex can be great, but there are risks involved. Aside from all the emotional issues, you can catch infections, and a woman can become pregnant. If you don't want to end up in a STD clinic or with a baby, using a condom is a good idea. Do you *like* the idea of telling your parents that you're pregnant or you have herpes?

It's okay - my boy/girlfriend'll sort it out. . .

Some people think it's the man's job to make sure he uses a condom; some people think contraception is up to the woman. They're both wrong - it takes two to have sex, so both partners should make an effort. If you're not responsible enough to sort out contraception, you're not responsible enough to be having sex. If you're sleeping with someone, you should have enough respect for them to protect them.

What about when we haven't got a condom?

Then if you want to be safe, you'll have to get one. Some types of contraception (such as the pill) are more effective than condoms for avoiding pregnancy, but won't reduce your chances of contracting a sexually transmitted infection.

And if you're single, it doesn't hurt to carry condoms with you - just in case!

Doesn't that make me look 'easy'?

No - it makes you look like you're mature enough to look after yourself.

Oh, and it's okay to put a condom in your pocket or your wallet if you're going out for the night, but don't keep them in there for long - they'll get damaged! Condoms need to be stored in a cool, dry place. They also have a sell-by date on the packet - don't use condoms that are too old.

You can't catch anything or get pregnant on your first time though, can you?

Actually, you can. It's scary enough having sex for the first time without having to worry about using condoms, too. But you do need to - if you're nervous about using condoms or if you don't want to seem inexperienced, practise with them in advance. A boy could try one when he masturbates, to get used to what it feels like and what to do with it when he finishes.

Okay. . . so where can I get some?

Buying condoms can seem frightening or embarrassing, especially for a young person, but it isn't really. You can get them in most pharmacies or drugstores and a lot of grocery stores sell them. You could ask for contraceptive advice and contraceptives from your doctor but you don't need a prescription to get them and sometimes condoms are even available for free to teenagers in schools or family-planning clinics. In most places, you can buy condoms whatever your age.

If you're still too embarrassed to go and buy them, you can sometimes get them from vending machines or over the internet at places like www.canadiancondom.com.

But there's so many different kinds! Which ones are best?

There are a lot of different kinds of condoms, but don't worry. Here's a list of the different types you can get:

Material - Most condoms are made from latex or polyurethane. The latex ones are a little stronger, so they give slightly better protection from STIs and pregnancy. A very small amount of people are allergic to latex, though, so they would use the polyurethane ones.

Size - Condoms come in lots of different sizes. You can get longer or shorter or wider or narrower ones. If a packet of condoms says 'large' or 'small', this is usually talking about the width of the condom, not the length. Be honest! A condom that is too big may come off, and a condom that's too small might break. Most condoms that you buy in shops and vending machines will be a standard size.

Lubricated - Some condoms are not lubricated at all, some have silicone-based lubricants, some have water-based lubricants. Some condoms are lubricated with a spermicide (see below).

Spermicidal - Some condoms have a spermicidal lubricant. One of the most common spermicides is called nonoxynol-9 and it is NOT recommended because it can cause irritation and increase the risk of HIV infection.

Ribbed - These condoms have little ridges running around them. These can make sex more pleasurable for both partners, and if they're used correctly (see below) then they're just as safe as ordinary ones. Ribbed condoms are the answer for people who complain "But I can't feel anything if I use a condom. . . "

Coloured - The natural colour of latex is a creamy white, so lots of condoms have different colours - some of them even glow in the dark. Again, if they're used properly, they're fine.

Flavoured - Some sexually transmitted infections can be passed on by orally, so it's a good idea to use condoms for oral sex. Sometimes, people don't like the smell and taste of latex, so they use flavoured condoms. These can taste of anything from strawberry to curry! Flavoured condoms shouldn't be used for vaginal or anal sex though, unless they are approved by Health Canada or the FDA (in USA). If the package say "novelty only" it's not an approved condom.

Reservoir tipped - Most condoms have a reservoir tip to catch semen; some have a plain tip. If they have a reservoir tip, be sure to pinch the end when putting them on - if they have air inside them, they can break when you're having sex.

I'm still not sure

If you're unsure about what to do, it can help to talk things through with an adult but sometimes this is not possible. Teens sometimes find it embarrassing talking to their parents about sex - you could try asking a teacher or a guidance councillor for advice and information, if you're more comfortable with that.

So how good are they really?

There's lots of myths about how good or bad condoms are. If they're used correctly, condoms are about 94% - 97% (depending on which study you look at) effective at preventing pregnancy and they're nearly 100% effective at preventing transmission of HIV. Some people say that some viruses can 'pass through' latex - that's not true. They won't help against crabs, though, and some sexually transmitted infections (like herpes) can be caught through oral sex with someone who is infected, so you need to use condoms for this, too.

Is it even safer wearing two condoms?

No! The friction of the condoms rubbing together would probably make them both break, and it wouldn't be very comfortable for the person wearing them. You also shouldn't use the male and female condoms together.

What is the female condom?

There is also now a female condom, which is a type of pouch that fits inside the vagina.

How do I mention condoms without spoiling the moment?

"Everything's going great, the atmosphere's really romantic, and then you have to get a condom out. . . ."
One of the main reasons that teens say they don't like using condoms is that they think condoms interrupt a passionate moment - and it's true that it can be difficult to find, open and unroll a condom in the dark when you've both got your minds on other things.

But it doesn't have to be difficult and it doesn't have to 'spoil the moment'. The best way to make sure you can put a condom easily is to practise in advance . . . girls can practise on appropriately shaped vegetables. Then, when the time arrives to do it for real, you'll know what you're doing. Putting a condom on can be quite sexy. It doesn't have to be done by whoever is going to wear the condom - it can be quite an intimate thing for his partner to do. Keep your condoms and some lube close by and then you won't have to get up, put the lights on, go into the bathroom and hunt around in the back of the cupboard!

What is 'lube'?

Lubricant or 'lube' is like a cream or jelly that is sometimes used to make sex go a little more smoothly. Quite often being tense or rushing things can make sex difficult or painful, so try to relax and take your time. You might also want to use extra lubrication, like KY Jelly, Aqua Lube, Slippery Stuff or O'My, which you can buy from grocery or drug stores. But if you are using a condom, then you **MUST** use a water-based lubricant like KY jelly, and not an oil-based lubricant like Vaseline. Oh, and lube goes on the outside of the condom, when the man is wearing it - if you put it on the inside, the condom can slip off.

Any tips for putting condoms on?

Firstly, you should put the condom on before there's any contact between the penis and your partner's body. Fluids released from the penis even very early on in sex can cause pregnancy or transmit an STI.

So, when the penis is erect, open the condom wrapper. Don't do it with your teeth! This can cause tiny rips in the condom that you might not notice. Unroll the condom a little over the top of the penis - make sure that the roll is on the outside - if it's backwards then the condom won't unroll. If there's any air trapped in the condom, this can cause it to break, so make sure you pinch the end to squeeze any air out. Then just firmly roll the condom down as far as you can. If you want to use any lube, put it on the outside of the condom and make sure its water-based lubricant, such as KY. Oil based lubricants can weaken the condom and make it break.

What if it breaks?

If a condom breaks while you're having sex, then stop right away and put a new condom on. While you're having sex you can sometimes feel if a condom has broken, but not always, so you should check occasionally that it's okay. If you think some semen has escaped from the condom you might want to think about talking to your doctor about getting emergency contraception and a HIV/STI test.

Do I need to use a condom for oral sex?

Yes, you should really. Some sexually transmitted diseases and infections (such as herpes) can be passed on by oral sex. When you use a condom for oral sex, you should change condoms before having vaginal or anal sex, because teeth may have made little holes in it. Some flavoured condoms are approved for STI protection, read the package to be sure.

What about anal sex?

Again, yes. Anal sex is one of the most high-risk things you can do in terms of STIs, and it won't necessarily stop a woman from getting pregnant. Anal sex can put more of a strain on a condom, so you should use stronger ones, and plenty of water-based lubricant.

Okay, when do we stop?

After he has cum, a man using a condom needs to stop and take the condom off. If you carry on having sex, it can burst. If you want to carry on, that's fine, just put a new condom on again, and away you go. Never re-use a condom.

When the man pulls his penis out, he should hold the base of the condom to make sure that comes out, too. And when taking a condom off, don't just pull on the end. Roll it back from the base and throw it away safely - you might want to tie a knot in the end to stop it leaking. Don't flush used condoms down the toilet - they cause pollution. And don't leave it under the bed for your mum to find!